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MEMBER OF AUDIT BUREAU OF CIRCULATION

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*Despite a number of new pieces of intriguing evidence,
no one has yet been able to put together
the story of what really happened.
There are just too many open questions floating around.*

Oswald: Why the JFK Truth Will Never Be Known

By Ernie Volkman

On the night of last March 15, George de Mohrenschildt walked into the second-floor drawing room of a Palm Beach mansion, placed the muzzle of a 20-gauge shotgun in his mouth and blew the back of his head off.

Suicide, the police said, and so the death of the 65-year-old professor of French at Bishop College in Dallas, Texas, was entered into the records of the Palm Beach County Police Department as "apparent suicide by self-inflicted gunshot wound." A perfectly fair ruling, considering the fact that there was no evidence to contradict it.

Nevertheless, there remain a number of questions in connection with the incident—and few of them have anything to do with the actual death. The questions have more to do with the dead man himself, for he was no ordinary small-college professor of French. In fact, de Mohrenschildt played a still-to-be determined role in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. What exactly his role was will never be determined, since his death occurred just as investigators of the House Assassination Committee were scheduled to begin a detailed examination of de Mohrenschildt's precise connection with the tragic events of nearly 15 years ago.

A brief outline of what is known about him: Over a year before the Kennedy assassination, de Mohrenschildt and his wife became friends with Mr. and Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald through mutual friends in Dallas' Russian emigré com-

munity (Marina Oswald was born in Russia). After the assassination, the de Mohrenschildts were interviewed extensively by the FBI as part of the Warren Commission investigation, but they told agents they could shed little light on either Oswald or his motives.

But in February 1977, de Mohrenschildt dropped a bombshell: in an interview with a friend who was also a Dutch journalist, the quiet professor said he had prior knowledge of the Kennedy assassination (apparently through Oswald). De Mohrenschildt was quoted as saying, "How do you think the media would react if I came out and said that I feel responsible for Oswald's behavior?" Before these tantalizing hints could be investigated, de Mohrenschildt committed suicide. Moreover, shortly before his death, questions arose as to whether de Mohrenschildt was all he said he was—an ex-petroleum engineer. There are some reports that he really worked for U.S. intelligence agencies.

The de Mohrenschildt case remains a mystery, and probably one that may never be solved. And curiously, it is just one of the series of mysteries that are woven throughout the Kennedy assassination. Indeed, all that we now know about the Kennedy assassination is really a collection of unexplainable mysteries, or, as one assassination investigator puts it, "The whole thing's a mystery; there are so many things that make no sense, I'm not sure it will ever be straightened out."

At one time, of course, there didn't

seem to be much of a mystery about what happened on November 22, 1963 in Dallas. According to the official government Warren Commission investigation, a down-on-his-luck loner named Lee Harvey Oswald planned and carried out the assassination of President Kennedy by shooting the President from the upper story of a building along the presidential motorcade route. Oswald, said the Commission, acted alone and was not part of any conspiracy.

That verdict, reached in 1964, has come under increasing attack in subsequent years, and the weight of evidence casting doubt on the commission's judgment has all but rendered it useless. The fact is, nobody really believes the Warren Commission verdict holds up at this date. But despite a number of new pieces of intriguing evidence, no one has yet been able to put together the story of what really happened. That task, of course, would be gargantuan—simply put, there is too much that is not known to make any kind of final judgment.

Put another way, there are just too many open questions floating around. Here are some of the most important ones:

Did Lee Harvey Oswald Really Kill President Kennedy? This remains the central question of the entire Kennedy assassination case. In an important sense, Oswald is the greatest mystery of all; for all the exhaustive investigation into his life, everything is known about



Lee Harvey Oswald is shown squeezed together with his wife, Marina, in this 1962 photo which was taken in a photo booth at a Dallas bus station.

Oswald, but almost nothing is known about him. The fact is more than ironical—Oswald's death in a Dallas police station over 14 years ago deprived investigators of the most important piece of evidence in the entire assassination: Oswald's mind.

Why is Oswald's mind so vital? Because the central mystery about Oswald is why he would want to kill Kennedy in the first place, especially considering the fact that Oswald was not known to harbor any especially deep grudge against the President. Assuming for a moment that the Warren Commission was right and that Oswald was a demented soul whose tormented mind drove him to assassinate someone, why President Kennedy? But there's more.

Again, supposing for a moment that Oswald—as the Warren Commission says—did, in fact, shoot Kennedy, why leave a trail any ten-year-old child could follow? Not only did he allegedly fire at Kennedy from the Texas School Book Depository Building where he worked (and where everybody could identify him), but he apparently had no viable escape plan. If the belief is correct that Oswald planned for the assassination—the purchase of the rifle under an assumed name, etc.—then why didn't he plan an escape route? If, as has been speculated, that he wanted to be caught, then why did he allegedly shoot a Dallas police officer who tried to pick him up? Why did he deny any role in the assassination when first questioned at the Dallas police station?

A small, but interesting addendum: No one has ever explained the fact that both Oswald's mother and brother had said that there were a number of important differences in his physical appearance when he returned to the United States from the Soviet Union in 1962. For one thing, they told investigators, there was a two-inch disparity in Oswald's height. More intriguingly, according to medical records, Oswald had a mastoid operation in 1945; yet, photographs of Oswald taken shortly after his arrest in November 1963, show no mastoid scar behind either of his ears, a physiological impossibility. This raises the question of whether Oswald had a double.

How Did Oswald Get In and Out of the Soviet Union So Easily? Oswald's movements in and out of the Soviet Union are shrouded in mystery. In the first place, Oswald had enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1956, and although he professed some mildly Marxist sympathies, he never expressed any desire to live in the Soviet Union. Yet, after he got his discharge in 1959, Oswald immediately went to the Soviet Union, showed up at the American embassy, renounced his American citizenship, and told Soviet authorities he intended to settle for good in that country. Why? Oswald spent about two years in



*Above: George de Mohrenschildt
Opposite page: A recent picture of Marina Oswald. Marina has been thrust back into the*

limelight with the publication of a book about her and her late husband titled Marina And Lee.

the Soviet Union, and Soviet authorities have never given any information on exactly what he did in that country. For all intents and purposes, we know nothing of that critical period.

That period is a critical one, for there is no explanation of why Oswald finally decided to leave the Soviet Union and return to the United States. Had he become disillusioned? Did he become part of a conspiracy? The questions arise because it is highly unusual for an American defector to get quick approval for return to the United States. That is what happened in Oswald's case, and what's more, despite his renunciation of American citizenship and his two years spent in the Soviet Union, Oswald was able to re-enter this country with ease.

The mystery deepens when all this is judged in the context of Oswald's marriage to a young Russian woman named Marina Prusakov during his stay in the Soviet Union. Marina, it turns out, not only was a member of various Communist organizations, but also had relatives in high places—notably an uncle who happened to be a colonel in the KGB, Russia's CIA. Moreover, his chief task was keeping track of American defectors. That being the case, how did the niece of a high-ranking KGB officer and her American husband—an American defector—manage to get out of the Soviet Union so easily? And, if Oswald was so bitterly anti-American as to actually renounce his citizenship and leave

his country, why did he want to come back? Did the Russians have any idea of what Oswald planned to do when he returned to America? Is that why they let him come back?

Did Oswald Try to Kill General Walker? One of the key pieces of evidence suggesting that Oswald had become demented and was on a killing spree against prominent American figures is the accusation that he tried to kill retired Army General Edwin Walker in April 1962 (the shot just barely missed Walker while he was seated in the living room of his home). Walker had been forced to retire after he was charged with force-feeding his right-wing political views to the troops he commanded in Europe.

But the evidence for this alleged attempt by Oswald is less than circumstantial—Marina Oswald made the charge when she testified before the Warren Commission in 1964. Further, she said, Oswald made elaborate preparations for the attempt on Walker's life, including a detailed reconnaissance and written plans, which he left at the Oswald house. But that doesn't make any sense: why would Oswald go through all the trouble of planning such an assassination down to the last detail, yet leave incriminating evidence all over his house? Again, as in the case of the Kennedy shooting, there is no evidence



suggesting why Oswald would want to shoot Walker, nor is there any evidence that Oswald ever met the man.

Were the Cubans Involved with the Kennedy Assassination? This is a relatively new mystery connected with the assassination, occasioned by recently-unearthed evidence showing that the CIA tried, on several occasions, to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, that Castro knew about it, and that he, on at least two occasions, publicly threatened the Kennedy brothers with retaliation if they didn't stop the plots. Additionally, there is an Oswald connection. In 1963, Oswald joined the leftist Fair Play for Cuba Committee, and was involved one day in a scuffle in New Orleans with Cuban exiles who objected to his distribution of pro-Castro leaflets.

Oswald's involvement with this group is puzzling, for he had never been known to express any strong views about Cuba. And that's not the end of the puzzle. After he was arrested in that scuffle incident in New Orleans, he de-

manded to be interviewed by an FBI agent. According to subsequent testimony by the FBI, Oswald didn't tell them anything; in fact, the agent who carried on the discussion with Oswald said later he was completely bewildered by what Oswald wanted in the first place. Still, why did Oswald want to see an FBI agent? Is the FBI telling the truth about the conversation?

Some authorities have openly speculated that the Cubans planned and carried out the assassination against Kennedy as retribution for the American plots against Castro. The Cuban Premier himself has vigorously denied it; but the Cubans have had difficulty explaining exactly what Oswald was doing at the Cuban embassy in Mexico City in September 1963, two months before the Kennedy assassination. The Cubans say Oswald wanted a visa to Cuba (why?), and then talked openly of assassinating Kennedy. Then, they say, they threw him out of the embassy as a "provocateur."

The account, of course, doesn't make much sense. Even assuming that at that

time Oswald was planning to assassinate Kennedy, why go all the way to Mexico City, walk into the Cuban embassy and announce to perfect strangers that he was about to murder the President of the United States? And if the Cubans were upset by talk of Kennedy's assassination, why didn't they at least put the word out to a neutral nation or some other channel of the danger to Kennedy? Did the Cubans allow Oswald's plan to unfold because it served their purposes? Is that the real reason they didn't allow Oswald in Cuba?

Were the FBI and CIA Involved? When the Warren Commission Report began to fall apart early in this decade, the most damaging blows to its credibility were the questions that arose over CIA and FBI involvement, most importantly with the Commission itself. The key item was the revelation that the CIA, eager to protect the secret of its Cuban operations—primarily the assassination attempts against Castro—pressured the Commission to stay away from any investigation of a possible Cuban connection with Kennedy's assassination. In the process, the CIA withheld several crucial pieces of evidence, including the fact that it had an informant planted inside the Cuban embassy in Mexico City that Oswald had visited. Only after the Warren Commission finished its work was it learned that the informant had told the agency that she overheard a conversation between Oswald and the Cubans discussing the Kennedy assassination at some length.

The FBI matter is much more mysterious. Apparently, Oswald and several FBI agents had developed some sort of relationship—possibly Oswald may have acted as an informer within the Fair Play for Cuba Committee—but the extent and purpose of the relationship has never been fully explained. Moreover, there are strong suspicions that Oswald may have done some sort of unspecified work for American intelligence agencies when he went to the Soviet Union. Again, these have never been fully explained.

Was the American Government Really Interested in the Truth of the Kennedy Assassination? A leading question, but the evidence continues to accumulate that the official government investigation into Kennedy's death was aimed not so much at getting the truth, as it was in coming up with a palatable answer that would satisfy the American public—and at the same time avoid a number of potentially embarrassing questions. That process began on November 25, 1963, only three days after the assassination, when then-Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach wrote a memo to Presidential Assistant Bill Moyers, saying, "Speculation about Oswald's motivation should be cut off, and we should have some



General Edwin A. Walker

basis for rebutting the thought that this was a Communist conspiracy"

With that sort of high-level pressure, it's no wonder that the official inquiry simply ignored a whole range of areas of interest. The CIA's stonewalling the investigation was begun by the then-director of the CIA, John McCone, when he appeared before the Warren Commission in 1964. Asked whether the agency had intentions of disclosing any information in its sensitive files that might bear on the assassination investigation, McCone replied, "That is right; all information of every nature [we will provide] in our files or in the minds of our employees."

A pretty sweeping statement, but a lie, as it later turned out, for the agency never bothered to tell the Commission about plots against Fidel Castro—a vital piece of evidence when considering possible motives for killing Kennedy. Eleven years later, in 1975, the new CIA director, Richard Helms, was on the carpet before the Senate Intelligence Committee. Among other things, com-



mittee members were curious about how forthcoming the agency had been back in 1964 before the Warren Commission (Helms attended Commission meetings as a CIA representative).

"You had been part of an assassination attempt against Castro?" asked Senator Robert Morgan of North Carolina.

HELMS: I was aware that there had been efforts to get rid of him by those means.

MORGAN: You were charged with furnishing the Warren Commission information that you thought relevant?

HELMS: No, sir. I was instructed to reply to inquiries from the Warren Commission for information from the Agency. I was not asked to initiate any particular thing.

MORGAN: In other words, if you weren't asked for it, you didn't give it.

HELMS: That's right, sir.

Pretty cute, right? As Morgan had gotten Helms to admit, the CIA did not give out any information unless it was specifically asked for it. And since Commission members had no way of knowing about any CIA assassination attempts against Fidel Castro, they could hardly be expected to ask about them.



The same applies to the FBI: that agency didn't do any volunteering of information, either, so the Commission obviously was deprived of potentially valuable information—perhaps even explosive information—by the fact that there were at least two major agencies of the government trying hard to ensure they wouldn't find it.

Given all that, it is almost incredible today to re-read the conclusions of the Warren Report and note that the Commission praised government agencies who helped them in the investigation and that these agencies—presumably including the FBI and the CIA—"fully

discharged their responsibilities to cooperate. . . ."

These are just some of the major mysteries that now hang over the Kennedy assassination. Not mentioned are the assorted theories about gunmen on the grassy knoll, "Manchurian Candidate" ideas about Oswald, charges by some Cuban exiles that other exiles participated in the assassination planning, and so on and so forth. Not enough evidence exists to prove any of these theories one way or the other.

Whatever the merits of those theories, the fact remains that they are only part

of the cloud of mystery and doubt that hangs over the Kennedy assassination, nearly 15 years after the event occurred.

Will the case ever be closed? Probably not, both because there are too many questions that cannot be answered with any finality and because there are still too many people who really don't want the real truth to come out. Then, too, Lee Harvey Oswald himself remains an enigma who took unknown secrets to the grave with him. Even Marina Oswald says she can't make any sense about her late husband. Asked during her testimony to government investigators why so much of what he did seemed contradictory, Marina replied, "He was such a person that nothing seems peculiar to me for what he did. I had so many surprises from him that nothing surprised me."

Is Marina Oswald telling the truth? Could she have been married several years to a man and yet seem not to know him at all?

An interesting question, but that's another mystery. ○